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A WOMAN ALONE

MRS. W. K. CLIFFORD

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PRESENTED BY

A WOMAN ALONE

OTHER PLAYS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LIKENESS OF THE NIGHT

A LONG DUEL

THREE PLAYS, a volume containing
HAMILTON'S SECOND MARRIAGE
THOMAS AND THE PRINCESS
THE MODERN WAY

Several One Act pieces

A WOMAN ALONE

IN THREE ACTS

BY

MRS. W. K. CLIFFORD

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1915

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

RICHARD BOWDEN
HENRY LANGTON, *his cousin*
JACK PERCIVAL
SIR HORACE TAYLOR
ALGY CARSTAIRS, *a poet*
WIDHURST, *an actor*
HESKETH, *an editor*
BERTRAM, *a young Cambridge man*
A VISITOR (*at Innsbruck*)

BLANCHE BOWDEN
MILLICENT PERCIVAL
MRS. VYNOR
COUNTESS AUGUSTA
MRS. MARTIN

Servants, Porters, etc.

ACT I—An Ante-room in the Bowdens' house, Green Street, Park Lane.
Four years ago.

ACT II—Hall of the Kaiserhof, Innsbruck.
Two years ago.

ACT III—Blanche Bowden's drawing-room in Green Street *Present time.*

PREFACE

"A Woman Alone" appeared in the *Nineteenth Century and After* last spring: considerations of space made some omissions necessary. Three special performances were given at the Little Theatre late in July; but as the end of the Season was near the rehearsals were few and somewhat hurried. Miss Lillemor Halvorsen, the distinguished Norwegian actress, created the part of Blanche Bowden, and so beautifully that she almost persuaded me to like my own work: that was a new sensation.

Any interest the play has was meant to lie in the attitude of its chief characters towards current ideas. In Blanche Bowden I wanted to draw a woman full of intellectual energy and ideals who, since she was not strong enough to carry them on to achievement alone, longed to see them take shape in the life that was dearest to her. She finds herself handicapped by natural feminine instincts and comes to realise that the affections have still an unsuspected, sometimes an overwhelming, power of their own.

In this, the only acting version of the play, there are a good many slight but important alterations and

additions. I mention them lest some tired reviewer should write anything about it from his memories of the original version; just as two or three dramatic critics, who had evidently read it in the *Nineteenth Century*, seem to have written about the theatre performance. But life is short and time for anything at all more and more difficult to find: this makes me very grateful for all that some most kind and thoughtful writers did for me.

L. C.

7 Chilworth Street,
London, W.

ACT I

TIME: *Four years ago. Afternoon.*

SCENE: *A small drawing-room or ante-room at the Bowdens' house in Green Street, Park Lane. Well-furnished. Fireplace* R., *door* L. *Facing stage drawn curtains suggest a larger room beyond. Sitting over the fire is* HENRY LANGTON, *thin, delicate, and about forty. Pause.* JACK *and* MILLICENT PERCIVAL *come through the curtains. They are young and happy looking.*

MILLICENT. Why, it's Mr. Henry Langton.

LANGTON. How do you do, Mrs. Percival?

[*He has a dry cynical voice.*

MILLICENT. I was so sorry to hear you had been ill.

JACK. Better, old chap?

LANGTON. Not much. [*Warms one hand.*] I am waiting on the chance of seeing Richard. . . . So glad there's a fire—some people won't have one if the month happens to be called July.

MILLICENT. [*Sympathetic.*] I know——

LANGTON. I'm always chilly—in England; fires should be compulsory all the year round after five in the afternoon.

MILLICENT. Are you going in to see Mrs. Bowden?

LANGTON. No, thank you. She has enough visitors without me. I don't feel up to her level to-day. She is my relation since she married Richard—so there's no reason why I should be civil.

JACK. Afraid of her?

LANGTON. No—but . . . I can't talk to clever women—they have so many loose ends about them, you never know which they'll take up next.

MILLICENT. I think she's wonderful.

LANGTON. I like them commonplace.

MILLICENT. Oh—but—she isn't strong-minded or anything of that sort, and she is very sympathetic. [*To her husband.*] I told her to-day that we'd only been married two months. She asked if she might come and see us—I think she knows how happy we are.

JACK. [*To* LANGTON.] Do you hear her? I try to treat her well.

LANGTON. [*Cynically.*] Ah! Early days—but I dare say you'll get on better than Richard and his wife.

MILLICENT. Oh, but they adore each other. I know she adores him, that is . . . Why should you think they won't be happy?

LANGTON. I didn't say that. But when a man of seven-and-thirty and a woman of eight-and-twenty marry, I expect they've managed to rake in a good many opinions of their own beforehand and stick to them—at any price occasionally.

JACK. He hates the crowd she has gathered round her.

MILLICENT. She can't help it, people run after her so.

LANGTON. [*With a shrug.*] Every one seems to know her—and they've only been married a year. . . . Her name is in printed lists, too, pretty often; that sort of thing grows on a woman like a taste for drugs.

[MRS. VYNOR, *young and pretty, enters through the curtains.*

MRS. VYNOR. Oh! Mrs. Percival, you are still here! [*To* LANGTON.] How do you do?

JACK. [*Aside to* LANGTON.] It's Mrs. Vynor.

MRS. VYNOR. [*Hesitating.*] I forgot to ask Mrs. Bowden who was likely to be put up for the Royal Academy next week.

LANGTON. [*Drily.*] She would know, of course?

MRS. VYNOR. Oh yes, she knows everything. . . . It doesn't matter. I won't go back.

MILLICENT. How is your little girl? I wanted to ask you just now.

MRS. VYNOR. Better; but she had a temperature this morning. Mrs. Bowden called twice in one day last week to ask after her, and sent such wonderful flowers.

MILLICENT. I am certain she is a dear.

MRS. VYNOR. She *is*—but I must go. I wish I'd asked her about the election—Geoffrey will be vexed at my forgetting. He couldn't come himself—he was so disappointed.

MILLICENT. [*Turning to her husband.*] Did you hear

that? Mr. Vynor was disappointed at not coming himself.

MRS. VYNOR. Of course he was, and [*with a sigh*] he is dreadfully down on most women. Good-bye. So glad we met to-day. [*Exit* MRS. VYNOR.

MILLICENT. [*To* LANGTON.] Don't you *want* to see her?

LANGTON. No.

JACK. She's fascinating—even that woman has succumbed.

LANGTON. [*Reluctantly.*] I acknowledge it. . . . I believe she's bothering Richard to go into politics.

MILLICENT. Why shouldn't he?

LANGTON. Why should he? He'd hate it. What he likes is to bury himself in the country or some place where he is not likely to meet anyone who has ever seen him before.

MILLICENT. Do you know his mother? But of course you do. She told me—— [*Stops.*

LANGTON. You needn't be afraid. . . . It was probably something disagreeable?

MILLICENT. She said that before he was married he often went away for months at a time and gave no one his address.

LANGTON. [*Nods.*] It was one of his provoking habits. . . . He took himself off for a year just after he had taken his degree—matters weren't to his liking at home, or something displeased him. His theory is if you don't like a thing go away from it—if you don't like a man, cut him.

JACK. There's a good deal to be said for it.

LANGTON. Once he was away for two or three years and not a soul knew whether he was alive or dead, for he never writes a letter—and it doesn't occur to him to telegraph.

JACK. It was during one of those absences that he first met his wife.

LANGTON. [*Looking up.*] In Vienna. . . . But you were with him, Percival?

JACK. Yes. It was through me, in fact, that they did meet. I took him to old Count Zipernowsky's.

LANGTON. I know. But I never heard much about it. I was away. Who precisely was Ziper—Ziper—something?

JACK. Her uncle—he used to make speeches, very fine nonsense they sounded—a splendid old chap with white hair. He lived in a palace that was crumbling to bits. She looked after him and held a court once a week. I expect that's how she got at all this business. Heaps of men were at her feet, but I was amazed when Richard went down. . . . [*To his wife.*] Look here, we must be off. We ought to have gone half an hour ago. [*To* LANGTON.] We're going to a restaurant dinner and the play. She loves a spree.

LANGTON. I believe people do that sort of thing when they are newly married.

MILLICENT. [*Gaily.*] It's all so exciting.

JACK. You see, she lived in the country till she was married—and picked buttercups and daisies——

MILLICENT. I didn't——

JACK. [*Teasing.*] Well, played lawn tennis and went to tea at the vicarage.

[*The* PERCIVALS *are about to go when enter* RICHARD BOWDEN *door* L. *He is tall and handsome, about thirty-eight, with an obstinate indolent manner; gives an impression of being reserved.*

JACK. Here *is* Richard.

RICHARD. Why—are you going, Jack?

JACK. Must, I'm afraid, awfully sorry. But glad to have caught sight of you for a minute——Come, Millie.

MILLICENT. How do you do, Mr. Bowden, and good-bye. [*Shakes hands.*] We are going out on a little spree—we shall be late.

RICHARD. I hope it will be a good one.

[*Exeunt* JACK *and* MILLICENT.

RICHARD. Are you better?

[*It is evident that the two men like each other.*

LANGTON. A little—it doesn't matter. . . . I'm going away—directly almost. Think I shall live abroad for the future.

RICHARD. [*Anxiously.*] You can manage it?

LANGTON. I *must*—this beastly climate does for me. I have been hoping you would come in—waited on the chance. I didn't venture to intrude there.

[*Nods towards other room.*

RICHARD. Are there many fools left?

LANGTON. I think not. [RICHARD *makes a sound of*

satisfaction.] The cackling has been growing fainter for some time.

RICHARD. That's it—cackle—cackle.

LANGTON. Lord Faringhurst went out as I came in—judging from his mysterious air he had been telling your wife a few Cabinet secrets. Or perhaps she wants him to find you another job. Didn't he give you that mission to Petersburg?

RICHARD. Yes.

LANGTON. You've done nothing since—let your great talents run to seed.

RICHARD. For God's sake let my great talents go to the devil if they like.

LANGTON. What has become of the political ideas you were hatching two years ago?

RICHARD. [*With a quick smile.*] I was pretty eager about them, wasn't I? [*Crosses the room.*] . . . I hate all this nonsense—we have dined out five times this week. One night we went to the Geographical, to-night we go to the Foreign Office. There have been people to luncheon twice—to discuss some philanthropic scheme she has joined. . . . One afternoon there was a tom-fool committee here—some precious society for keeping people at home in the evenings——

LANGTON. I should have thought you would approve of that?

RICHARD. Not if they make it an excuse to invade *my* home. . . . Besides, I dislike women who mix themselves up with public matters. . . . These

drawing-room cackles are the thin end of the wedge.

LANGTON. [*Cynically.*] They mean to drive it in. But I don't think Blanche will do it—offensively. [RICHARD *gives a snort.*] . . . You ought to be proud of her; she's a fashion. And ambitious, I believe—for you.

RICHARD. Ambitious people annoy me. They degenerate into pushers if they are women.

LANGTON. [*Quickly.*] Blanche will never be a pusher.

RICHARD. [*With a hard note in his voice.*] No, I'll take care she isn't.

LANGTON. You ought to have married a pretty little simpleton like Percival's wife. She would have suited you much better.

RICHARD. She would have bored me to death——

[*A man comes out of the inner room.*

LANGTON. Here's the great editor.

RICHARD. [*Coldly.*] How do you do, Hesketh?

HESKETH. How do you do and good-bye. I've had a delightful talk with your wife; she has been telling me that I must get some fresh blood into the paper; a few young slashers who can write good English, and are ready to solve the Universe whenever you please. She's quite right. We want waking up.

RICHARD. What people call waking up is making this country unfit to ive in.

HESKETH. Oh. . . Well, see you at the F.O. to-night—I don't know what your wife is saying to Sir

Horace Taylor; but he seems mighty pleased. I hear he has been given some Foreign Order, by the way, and has leave to wear it. [*Exit* HESKETH.

RICHARD. [*To* LANGTON.] Should like to see him get an order for Siberia from the Russian Ambassador —who, I suppose, hasn't power to give it.

LANGTON. I fear not. . . . Didn't Blanche see a good many people before she was married?

RICHARD. Too many—the result of living with that old wind-bag, Zipernowsky. I believe she wrote his speeches.

LANGTON. You ought to be glad she didn't make them.

[SIR HORACE TAYLOR *comes through the curtains, followed by* ALGY CARSTAIRS.

SIR HORACE. Ah, Bowden, how do you do? Mustn't stop to talk to you. Carstairs and I have both stayed far too long, but your wife is so eloquent —told me all the benefits the Italians gained from the Austrian occupation. Never understood it before.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*Who is affected and intense.*] Sir Horace is entirely subjugated by the beautiful lady with the soulful eyes.

RICHARD. [*Coldly.*] Indeed—what does soulful mean?

ALGY CARSTAIRS. The soul is the little seed from heaven that is sown in every human being—and the rest depends on ourselves, whether it expands and grows and soars, or withers and falls lower and lower

into the earth; and the eyes are the soul's indicators, its messengers.

RICHARD. [*Shortly.*] Oh.

SIR HORACE. [*Amused.*] This man speaks as a poet. You should have heard him in there.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. Mrs. Bowden is so stimulating. She makes one feel as if one had genius, and that its achievements might be delayed but were certain. She is a lamp that shows the way.

RICHARD. Glad to hear it. A lamp is a most convenient thing to have in the house.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*To* SIR HORACE.] He will understand later—even for him she will light the difficult paths. [*To* RICHARD.] She has given me permission to dedicate my next volume of poems to her—I am going to the publisher now.

RICHARD. Do, I wouldn't detain you for the world. Good-bye. [*To* SIR HORACE.] We shall meet to-night, I suppose?

SIR HORACE. Of course. Come, Carstairs, if I'm to drop you.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. I come.

[*Exeunt* SIR HORACE *and* ALGY CARSTAIRS.

RICHARD. [*As he looks after them.*] I wish some one would dedicate your funeral sermon to her. . . . [*To* LANGTON.] Are there any more in there?

LANGTON. I don't think so—yes, Widhurst.

RICHARD. He is the gaping idiot who wants to act and can't—so he talks about some asinine scheme he

calls a theatre of intellect—with other people's money, and himself as manager, of course.

LANGTON. Here he is!

[*Enter* WIDHURST, *young, evidently in a hurry.*

WIDHURST. [*To* RICHARD.] Ah, how do you do? I have been having a most interesting talk with Mrs. Bowden. She has promised me an introduction to Thornthwaite—she knows everybody. I told her I should prefer just to walk on—it leaves one time for thought and observation.

RICHARD. Suit you, no doubt—you had some scheme?

WIDHURST. I have—a great one. But the moment is not ripe for it; meanwhile I must humour the philistine. Good-bye.

RICHARD. Good-bye. [*Exit* WIDHURST.

LANGTON. What sort of a chap was this Zipernowsky?

RICHARD. Oh, the usual indefinite fanatic. . . . Blanche made half his success and his own picturesque appearance did the rest. Most of the fanatical people are not fit to look at. He was, and [*half tenderly*] she is. I don't mean that she's a fanatic—but she has ideals, and that sort of thing—which is nearly as bad. Women are so restless nowadays. I wish I could get her away. Luckily the season is nearly over.

LANGTON. The season is an accursed time; when all the idiots ineligible for asylums are let loose in London. Naturally a nice woman, who doesn't know,

takes them seriously. . . . This is her first year in England.

RICHARD. But she knows the world. She's a woman, not a girl. . . . I should like to get away again—alone. It suits me to be alone, always did. Or, I wish I were going with you.

LANGTON. The manner in which I rough it wouldn't suit you. I'm a poor man and you are a rich one.

RICHARD. You *needn't* rough it.

LANGTON. [*Drily.*] I prefer it. . . . The only thing I shall miss is your society. I like it, in spite of your unfortunate temper. I always regretted not going to Innsbruck that time you asked me.

RICHARD. [*Who has not been listening.*] Suppose I take you as far as Italy? When do you start?

LANGTON. Next week. I don't want you, Richard. [*Gets up.*

RICHARD. [*Chafing.*] I was not made for this sort of thing; I feel caged, caught in a net . . . I wonder why men marry?

LANGTON. Perhaps she wonders why women marry.

[*Enter* BERTRAM *from the inner curtains.*

BERTRAM. Ah, Mr. Bowden, I'm just going. One moment! [*Goes back.*] Mrs. Bowden——

RICHARD. Who is that idiot?

LANGTON. He is——[*a shrug*] I don't know. Yes, I do. Rather a nice chap, called Bertram—just taken his degree. Well, good-bye. [*About to go, turns back.*] By the way, who was the comfortable German

woman I met here the other day—Countess Augusta; is she a daughter of Count Ziper——?

RICHARD. No, his daughter-in-law. She has been over here on a visit—going back to Vienna to-morrow. She's too fat.

LANGTON. I like them fat. They are comfortable to look at in cold weather. Good-bye. [*Exit.*

BERTRAM. I am the very last. Good-bye.

[*Exit hurriedly.*

[RICHARD BOWDEN *alone, stands by fireplace watching the curtains. They open and* BLANCHE *is seen facing stage. She is tall, beautiful, somewhat imperious. In moments of excitement she speaks with a slight foreign accent.*

BLANCHE. Rich-ard [*sounds like a caress*], you are there! Why did you not come in? . . . You are not cross any more?

RICHARD. I'm tired of the people who crowd this house for the sake of hearing themselves speak. The whole thing is a nuisance and must come to an end.

BLANCHE. [*A little amused.*] Why, you are more cross—even than before? I am so tired of foolish little quarrels.

RICHARD. You bring them on yourself. My mother told me that she found you, with a crowd round you, discussing matters that were better left alone—or she supposed so, for when she entered the talk suddenly flagged.

SHE. It did flag, but it was not for that reason. . . . What else did she say?

HE. [*Evidently chafed at his mother's sarcasm.*] She asked if you were trying to get me into the Cabinet.

SHE. And you said——?

HE. That if ever I did get into it the door would not be opened by a woman.

SHE. You wouldn't like that?

HE. [*With a snap.*] No, I should not. . . . You are never happy unless you imagine you are in the whirl of things and have a crowd of people round you.

SHE. It is quite true, my Richard. I like to think that I am in the whirl, not sitting still, doing nothing, thinking about nothing, being nothing. . . . And I like the people who come here and tell me of all that is going on.

HE. I do not.

SHE. But why don't you, Richard? They are not useless; they belong to the crew of the ship.

HE. Ship?

SHE. Isn't the world a big ship? There are the passengers and the crew who make it go—it is the crew that come here. There are those who do politics, those who fight—the men who make history, or pictures, or music—they all make something that helps the world to go on. You will not live always not making something yourself? [*Goes nearer to him.*]

HE. [*Coldly.*] What I make, as you call it, is my own affair.

SHE. But *you* are my affair; I want to gain for

you those things for which you yourself will not stretch out a hand. I should like to see you a king! Sometimes I say to myself you shall be one—the real kings of the earth are the uncrowned ones.

HE. [*Determined not to be propitiated.*] This is nonsense. . . . Next Saturday people shall be told that you are not at home.

SHE. [*Sitting down opposite him.*] We will give up the people if you wish, *cher ami*—is there anything else that vexes you?

HE. And I will not be annoyed by constantly coming across your name in print.

SHE. [*Teasingly.*] But it does look nice, doesn't it?

HE. Just now I had a telegram asking me to help with a festival of which you are a patroness——

SHE. Oh yes— And you answered?

HE. I answered *No.*

SHE. [*With a little laugh.*] Oh—oh—but, my darling, that was wicked—very wicked. . . . [*A long pause.*] Rich-ard?

HE. Yes?

SHE. [*Leaning forward eagerly.*] What are we going to do with our lives?

HE. Do with them?

SHE. How are we going to pay for them?

HE. Pay for them?

SHE. Pay the world that lets us live in it, breathe in it, covers us with its beautiful sky, and gives us strength and health and a thousand things besides——

HE. Including various ills and worries.

SHE. They are penalties. We have to pay for all the good things we have, and for the bad ones we do —to pay a great deal for the bad ones, that is certain.

HE. This is some of Uncle Zipernowsky's precious teaching—how are we to pay for the good things?

SHE. We who are rich and strong can pay with the lives we live and the work we do—work that others who have to fight for daily bread cannot afford to do.

HE. Socialism.

SHE. [*Firmly.*] No, Richard, not that. I don't want to give away our money and goods; but we have time and opportunity; it is as wicked to throw them away as—as to throw away food that would feed hungry people. [*He looks at her in wonder.*] . . . Besides, we cannot live shut up in this little house, seeing no one, doing nothing that is any good.

HE. We can be quiet—and together. A year after marriage people usually live sensible unruffled lives.

SHE. It is why they are often so dull. They settle down to the little circle and the family life; they shut all the windows looking outwards and live sensible unruffled lives. . . . It is not enough, not enough, dear Richard.

HE. My mother and sisters had none of the excitements you have gathered round you—and they have been content.

SHE. [*Nods.*] And *they* are very dull. They have

only little trivial matters to think about. They stay in a still house and have nothing to do, and they do not understand the people who want to *live*, who *must* live as long as they stay in the world. . . . We must go on—and on—if we want to keep hold of life.

HE. Where did you get all these notions? You hadn't them when we first met.

SHE. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, yes, always. My uncle was getting old; he used to say I must carry on his work. But—*you* came and made me love you. [*Goes up to him.*] It was like the tide of the sea, and swept me into your arms. I am glad. . . . But if you had not come, some day I should have done things—I, your Blanche, would have done them.

HE. My dear, I can't bear ambitious women. [*Puts his arms round her and she nestles joyfully, but anxiously, in them.*] There, [*tenderly*] isn't she happiest when her man's arms are round her?

SHE. [*Nods.*] Oh, I love being here . . . and I am not ambitious for myself any more—it is for you—for you [*with a long sigh*] . . . I could not bear to think that I had married a man who did nothing!

HE. [*Brushing back her hair.*] Is it nothing to love you?

SHE. [*Simply and appealing.*] It is *my* life. But you do not love me dreadfully—dreadfully much?

HE. I love you as much as most men love their wives—perhaps more.

SHE [*Drearily.*] Perhaps more. . . .

HE [*Kissing her forehead and then letting her go.*]

Give up all these silly notions; we will live quietly in the country——

She. No, no [*shakes her head*]; it is not as if you had land to cultivate—or duties there. [*Sits.*] We will go by and by, when we are old. Or if God sends us children, or if you have work to do, that is better done apart. But now you must not deprive your country of that which has been born with you, for its use.

He [*Standing by her.*] You talk such nonsense [*half impatiently, half tenderly*]. You mean to say that we have no right to be happy and enjoy life together on the money that I have inherited?

She. But anyone can inherit. It is no merit at all. And we can't go on like this . . . you would grow stupid, dearest—yes, you would. . . . [*Touches his hand.*] And women must have children to mother or work to do, or their lives are useless. Oh, Richard, won't you see it? If you went into Parliament, for instance? You have a clear head, you are clever, you have time to give to public affairs—it is the best men who should direct them. Yes, darling, it is—[*caressing his hands as he stands by her*], and I will make all the little conditions of your life so easy that you will do your best, your very best work.

He. [*Evidently thinking and not listening.*] We will go abroad for a bit, then we shall get away from —all this nonsense.

She. [*Rather catching at the prospect.*] Yes, let us go abroad. But not for too long—for pleasure that

does not come after work or difficulty is soon wearisome.

HE. Work—work again! What next?

SHE. What next? Why this! [*with a queer little smile*] Some day I think people will be taken up for idleness.

HE. [*Trying to hide the fact that he is growing angry.*] I hate the everlasting movement of the time, and the restless platform women——

SHE. [*Quickly.*] I am not one of those—I do not want to be—though I want to be allowed intelligent interests, in my home. That is what women have been struggling for in this country—to be allowed intelligent interests, and occupations, without jeers and patronage, and because this has not been recognised, they have gone to extremes.

[*He moves impatiently.*

SHE. You don't understand. Women are different now from when our mothers were young. They know more, they have thought more, learnt more—and they want to have their part—but not the bigger part; and it is only the people who are old-fashioned, or narrow, who are afraid of giving women a little share of life. . . . They cannot bear the useless life any longer, unless they are stupid. If I helped you——

HE. You want me to worry myself with the wear and tear of public life against my own inclinations?

SHE. I want you to make a career—to justify our existence.

HE. Justify our existence! What rubbish! Under-

stand once for all—I will not have my house made intolerable, nor my life laid out for me.

SHE. I do not want to lay it out; but you are growing angry——

HE. Yes, I am growing angry; it is for me to choose the life I lead, not you. Women have become a public nuisance with their demands and intellect and energy. [*A pause. In a hard voice.*] We married because we thought we should be happy together—if we find we were mistaken we will try being happier apart.

SHE. [*Dismayed.*] You would do that!

HE. Most certainly. If you cannot leave me alone to live as I choose, and unless you make this house the sort of place in which I care to stay, I shall leave it. I hate quarrels, and when people annoy me I usually go away from them.

SHE. [*Shivers.*] I cannot bear that you should speak to me in that tone. . . . You expect me to live here, depending on your humours and content with so little —you give me no companionship—we seldom discuss anything apart from our common interests in the house—or the people we have met at foolish parties. I want more—you do not give me enough.

HE. Home is a woman's place, and the life of a normal woman—the one she is best fitted for—should satisfy her.

SHE. Not now—she has gone on—though I do not know what you mean by a normal woman—I think it is a stupid one.

HE. [*Taking no notice of the interruption.*] You can

play about—I believe that is the term nowadays—in the house, and amuse yourself in a manner that has contented many charming women. I don't care for society, but I will take you to parties or theatres occasionally, if you desire it. You can become intimate with various people, and I will not interfere—if I approve of them. But I will not have this nonsense going on—this struggle for a public or intellectual life—women are not meant for it, nor fit for it. I'm quite aware that a few exceptional women have had salons and so on, but in my opinion they were not desirable women. You can subscribe to charitable or social functions occasionally if you wish ; but I will not have your name flaunted in lists of committees for tom-fool objects, nor of people interested in modern movements—of which I do not usually approve—and you are not to give it to anyone—anywhere—without my permission. Do you hear?

She. [*Staring at him.*] Yes, I hear. You want me to live the sort of life that has been sufficient for your mother and sisters.

He. [*Firmly.*] Yes.

She. And you do not mean to give me more companionship than you have given me since—since six months after we married.

He. No. My method has been to live much to myself, and I intend to go on with it. . . . And I will not let you make this house intolerable with a crowd of people I do not want. It was perfectly ridiculous to-day. Henry and I were in this room—

it felt like a waiting-room—while you and your set gabbled in there, and imagined you were helping the world to go on——

SHE. But you go out. You go to your club—you are away often for hours and hours. Why should you object if I find other companionships and interests, or if I gather people here—people that I like?

HE. I dislike hearing them, seeing them, knowing they are about the place. Besides, why should you want to drag me in among them?

SHE. [*Her face lighting up.*] Because they might suggest things to your thoughts, you would hear what the world wants——

[*Enter* SERVANT *with a letter, which he gives to* BLANCHE.

SERVANT. His lordship will send for an answer in half an hour. [*Exit* SERVANT.

SHE. [*Pleased and excited as she reads the letter.*] It is from Lord Faringhurst; he talked of you this afternoon. He said it was wicked you should not be in harness, for you were so clever. Yes, he did, Rich-ard. Listen—"Will you and your husband lunch with me at the Garrick on Thursday? You know that ladies are invited then?"—Oh, but I should like that, wouldn't you?

HE. [*Disdainful.*] Faringhurst is a bore. I suppose he thinks you would like to look at the actors who belong to the Garrick.

SHE. I should. [*Reads.*] "Then we can discuss the matter at which I hinted to-day. Curiously enough

I have just heard that there is likely to be a bye-election in my part of the world. Perhaps—[*hesitates*] if we could—induce him to stand——"

HE. Then you have already been laying out my life for me?

SHE. [*Astonished.*] Why, no, Richard—he likes you so much, and think how splendid it would be if you had not even to wait for a General Election.

HE. I'm not likely to be concerned in a General or any other election, so there is no necessity for our lunching at the Garrick.

SHE. Oh, but——

HE. You can write him a note at once——

SHE. But I should like it so much—I mean to lunch.

HE. I should not. Stay, I will write myself. [*Goes to table at side and writes a note while she looks at him dismayed. He folds it up, then unfolds it and reads*]: "Dear Faringhurst,—It is very good of you and my wife to interest yourselves in my welfare, but I have no intention of disturbing the peace of any constituency at present. I regret we shall be unable to lunch with you on Thursday." [*Rings.*

[*Enter* SERVANT.

Give this to Lord Faringhurst's messenger when he comes.

[*Exit* SERVANT *with note.*

SHE. [*Clasping her hands.*] Oh, it is dreadful—you will not live yourself and you will not let me live. And human beings are meant to do things, that

is why they count before all other creatures. They are not meant to eat and drink and sleep and do nothing—the world is tired of those, it has no use for them any more, and I did not mean to marry anyone of that sort.

HE. Thank you. I think it would be a good thing if I went away for a time—alone; then you could have your makers of history and all the windbags here as much as you pleased—till I returned. . . . While I was away you might learn what I expected from you——

SHE. [*Getting angry.*] You tell me a great deal about what you expect—you do not think that I should expect anything. . . . In Vienna I led a wonderful life—a woman's life, but it was full of interests and excitements that were not useless. If all women had useful interests—yes, and men too—men too, Richard, the world would be better, and there would not be so much time for things that are wicked or stupid or unkind. The mascot key of the world is work.

HE. Oh!— [*Impatiently turns away.*] I was always afraid of marriage—we rushed into it—it is evidently a mistake.

SHE. It is—it is a mistake—if this is it! [*Passionately.*] I am miserable—it was glorious to be free, but I didn't know it.

HE. Good. It was glorious to be free. I have felt that too. Perhaps we had better both be free again for a time.

SHE. If you want life alone, actually, as well as in

thought, I will go. [*Pause. She has gradually worked herself up into a state of suppressed but intense excitement.*] I will go back to Austria—there I was happy—I shall go back.

HE. No, you will not . . . you will stay here.

SHE. Why should I stay if I want to go?

HE. Because it is my pleasure.

SHE. [*Quickly.*] You will make me hate you. [*He gives a shrug.*] You do not believe it, because I have loved you so—but I *can* do it—I can *hate* too—love and hate are very near together, as near as a man and a woman——

HE. As near as a man and a woman—who are better apart.

SHE. That is so.

HE. Better—far better apart.

[*With a little haughty bow she sits down. He goes slowly out of the room. The door is left open. Pause. She looks up, pokes fire.*

SHE. [*To herself.*] A fire—in July! [*Shivers. Then in a low voice.*] Oh, I wonder—I wonder!

[*Enter softly the* COUNTESS AUGUSTA. *She is in outdoor dress, hat, etc.*

AUGUSTA. [*Gaily.*] What is it you wonder, my Blanche?

BLANCHE. [*Rises to her feet.*] Augusta! I did not hear you——

AUGUSTA. And I have only come for a moment—

we are going to-night instead of to-morrow—to say Good-bye, for we start at 8 o'clock. But what is it you wonder? [*Sits.*

BLANCHE. Augusta, I wonder why I married. Only I know why I did . . . but I was free, unshackled, ready to work for my country if the chance came. I could go where I pleased, and when I liked, I was *free!*

AUGUSTA. Ah! they talk so much about freedom —but it is not good, too much of it, for us women, my Blanche. And you are very happy now, for you love.

BLANCHE. [*In a toneless voice.*] Love is not all.

AUGUSTA. Not to a man—but to a woman, yes. Shall I tell you what is the matter? You are clever; and it is not good for you. The dear Count says that being clever spoils a woman's natural pleasures and gives her a man's disappointments without the strength to meet them.

BLANCHE. [*Amused.*] You are a poor comforter, Augusta. Did he say it of me?

AUGUSTA. Oh no, only to console *me;* for I am not clever, I am stupid! . . . He said you had a wonderful head, but——

BLANCHE. Yes, go on?

AUGUSTA. But that no woman ever had a wonderful head who did not pay for it some time with her heart.

BLANCHE. [*With a little laugh.*] You are a *very* poor comforter, Augusta.

CURTAIN

ACT II

TIME: *Two years later. Noon on an August day.*

SCENE: *The hall of the Kaiserhof at Innsbruck, large, well furnished, basket chairs, rugs, etc.; newspapers on tables, etc. Down stage,* L.C., *a small table and chairs so arranged that two people can sit and talk. At back,* C., *facing stage, a side-door, or wide window; it should be open, showing snow-topped mountains and beautiful scenery beyond. At back,* R., *is the Bureau of the hotel, farther down stage the open front door of the hotel, which should be double and important. On* L. *up stage is the staircase, and farther down, but not too near the footlights, a door leading to the dining-room.*

HENRY LANGTON *stands looking at a newspaper. He puts it down, goes to window at back. An elderly man is sitting,* L.C., *reading a book. People pass in and out, etc.*

Enter by front door R., JACK *and* MILLICENT PERCIVAL, *very hot and dusty and in high spirits. They have been cycling, and are dressed accordingly.*

MILLICENT. Thank goodness, we are at Innsbruck. I should have died if we'd had to go another mile.

[HOTEL SERVANTS, HALL PORTER, *etc.*, *come forward.*

JACK. [*To them.*] All right. Our machines are outside. We don't want rooms—only going to stay a couple of hours; a friend will meet us here directly. We'll lunch when she arrives.

[SERVANTS *bow and go.*

[HENRY LANGTON *listens and cautiously looks round.*

MILLICENT. [*Coming down stage.*] I hope she won't be long.

JACK. [*Following her.*] It *was* a pull, wasn't it?

MILLICENT. It was.

JACK. [*Seeing* VISITOR.] How do you do? We met at Beyreuth last month.

VISITOR. [*Puts down book.*] Of course. Did you cycle here?

JACK. Yes.

VISITOR. Rather warm for it?

JACK. Grilling!

MILLICENT. [*Gaily.*] And the hills—and the dust—and the things that sting—and the things that buzz!

VISITOR. So I should imagine. Have you come far?

JACK. Not to-day. We've been staying at Rosenheim.

VISITOR. Have you come from there now?

JACK. Well, no—but since yesterday. Only from

Jenbach this morning. Quite enough, I can tell you, in this blazing heat.

MILLICENT. [*To* JACK.] We did tell her the hotel was the Kaiserhof?

JACK, Of course. . . . Good Lord, it *is* hot!

VISITOR. Are you staying here some time?

JACK. No. Going on to Silz almost directly.

VISITOR. What sort of a place is that?

JACK. I don't know—not been there yet, it's near Landeck—five-and-twenty miles—and we've got to do it, that's all I know.

MILLICENT. [*Looking round.*] How lovely it is.

JACK. Not bad.

VISITOR. [*Getting up.*] Probably we shall meet at luncheon; you won't go on without food?

JACK. Not if we know it. . . . Are there many English people here?

VISITOR. Not many. That villa up there [*pointing to a little white patch on the mountain-side seen through the open door at back*] is occupied by two Englishmen; they usually come down about this time for their letters.

JACK. [*Looking up quickly.*] Two Englishmen?

VISITOR. They've been there some time, I'm told. . . . You ought to see the church before you go—Maximilian's Monument—it's only a few minutes off.

JACK. Must try—too hot now.

[*Exit* VISITOR, *leaving book on the table.*

MILLICENT, Oh—I *am* glad to rest.

JACK. [*Taking up book.*] What has the old boy been reading?—*Political Life* . . . Looks interesting.

MILLICENT. It *sounds* rather deadly—I can't bear politics.

JACK. Your sex is better without them, darling—far better. . . . Wonder who the deuce wrote this?

[HENRY LANGTON *comes towards them.*

MILLICENT. [*Excited.*] Mr Langton!

LANGTON. [*Drily.*] How do you do? I recognised you directly; my back evidently had not the same effect on you.

JACK. What an extraordinary thing to find you here. Where is Richard—is he with you?

LANGTON. Yes, he's up there—we're the two Englishmen who have the villa. [*Nodding towards it.*] How do you come to be here?

JACK. Been to Bayreuth.

LANGTON. Oh. . . . Seen anything of Mrs. Bowden lately?

JACK. Saw her yesterday—by a fluke—she has been to Vienna—is on her way back to England; we agreed to meet here, at this hotel, and lunch. She's driving from Jenbach.

LANGTON. This is interesting.

JACK. I always expected that Austria would draw them both.

MILLICENT. She wanted to come to her own country again, of course; but why should *he* come?

JACK. Because it is *her* country, and he met her first in it.

LANGTON. Not at all—he always liked Innsbruck.

He came to it several times before he met her—to his own disaster.

JACK. And hers too.

LANGTON. He's a good chap.

MILLICENT. Yes—but he's an iceberg.

LANGTON. An iceberg with a heart.

MILLICENT. If the heart is in the middle of the iceberg it isn't any good—for—for——

JACK. For human purposes.

LANGTON. Human purposes are often a nuisance. Are you intimate with her now, travelling together, or what?

JACK. Intimate! No one is *intimate* with her any more than with him. It's quite simple—she has been to Vienna, and we have been to Bayreuth. We saw her before we left London; she said she might be here about this date, so we determined to strike it—by great good luck we ran against her yesterday at Jenbach, where she had stopped to see a friend. We are going on to Silz and Landeck after we've fed and rested, and she is taking the train—somewhere; she didn't tell us where.

LANGTON. Not communicative? They are a curious pair. . . . Well, she stands a sporting chance of running against Richard. He'll be here directly.

MILLICENT. Oh! what will happen? [*With a little burst.*] Mr. Langton, why *did* her husband desert her in that cruel manner? It's two years since he went.

LANGTON. [*Drily.*] I wasn't aware that he deserted

her except at her own wish. Has she complained much?

MILLICENT. She hasn't complained at all—she's too proud even to speak of it.

LANGTON. Then you don't know the circumstances?

MILLICENT. All we know is, that very soon after the day when we met you there—you were sitting over the fire, do you remember?

LANGTON. Perfectly.

MILLICENT. I believe they had a quarrel that day. I am certain they did—and soon afterwards he went away and has not been seen since. . . . Her cousin Countess Augusta came again and stayed for nearly a month. She was *so* fat.

LANGTON. Dear woman—I could love her. What do people say about Richard?

MILLICENT. No one says much about him—of course they daren't say anything to her.

LANGTON. They went their separate ways without any scandal—they've done it most decently.

MILLICENT. I wonder if she even dreams that he may be here. I'm quite certain she didn't know where he was a month ago.

LANGTON. She could write to his bankers. . . . You probably heard that last year the fanatical uncle in Vienna left her a considerable fortune?

MILLICENT. I knew he died, we saw it in the papers; but she never tells one anything.

LANGTON. [*Grimly.*] They are well matched.

MILLICENT. And is he never going back to England?

LANGTON. Why should he? He has no home there now.

MILLICENT. The one in Green Street.

LANGTON. It is not his any longer. She inquired through an agent if he would sell it, and bought it with Zipernowsky's money. There's nothing to take him back.

MILLICENT. And are they always to be separated?

LANGTON. I don't know—I never asked him.

MILLICENT. Nor we her——

LANGTON. [*With a softer tone in his voice.*] I'm sorry for Richard. He's the only relation I don't loathe—he came out to me in Italy—disappeared—turned up again—we came here, to the villa. . . . I don't believe they would ever get on together.

JACK. He loved her from the moment he first saw her.

LANGTON. Now did he?

JACK. I'll swear he did. I shall never forget that night. I met him close to the Hofburg Theatre; he was going in to see a poetic drama by some wild Hungarian, whose portrait had afflicted the papers for a month past. I told him he'd better go to old Zipernowsky's. He scoffed, then suddenly chucked the play and went with me. She was standing at the top of the big staircase—at the door of the salon—it was hung with ragged tapestry, and rusty arms; I saw them look at each other—it was like a flash of mystified recognition, the whole thing seemed to be inevitable——

MILLICENT. It proves that they were born to love each other. And, if they met, and were alone, they might make it up and be happy. Let them have the chance.

LANGTON. I'm afraid the chance would soon be over.

MILLICENT. I would give the world to see things come right.

LANGTON. [*Looking at her with a vague surprise.*] You seem to be extraordinarily fond of her?

MILLICENT. We both are. Yet she's always rather distant—that little stately manner which she can't get past. But yesterday—*you* know what she did yesterday, Jack?

LANGTON. What did she do?

MILLICENT. We met her at Jenbach in a curiosity shop. She invited us to tea and walked back with us to our little inn. I said, "yes" or "no, Mrs. Bowden," of course; and suddenly she said, "I wish you would call me Blanche." I could have knelt on the roadway and kissed her hands.

LANGTON. Probably a dusty road, a good thing you didn't.

MILLICENT. There you are again. [*Laughing.*

JACK. You know, it's a curious thing, the tragedy of these two people, for there's nothing—nothing of the usual sort—in it.

LANGTON. Hope on—it may arrive; while man is man, and woman is woman, there's always a chance for the divorce court in the background. [*Pause.*

MILLICENT. You haven't asked anything about *us*, Mr. Langton. I wonder if you know that we have a son?

LANGTON. Really—a son! How old is he?

MILLICENT. Just a year—he's splendid.

LANGTON. Of course, they always are—what will you do with him?

MILLICENT. Do with him?

LANGTON. Not decided on his profession yet?

JACK. At present he counts as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the house—his taxes are fearful.

MILLICENT. But we don't mind a bit.

[*Enter* PORTER *with a telegram.*

PORTER. [*To* JACK.] Percival—is that your name?

JACK. Yes—but for me, a telegram!

PORTER. For you. [*Exit*

JACK. [*Tearing it open.*] It's from Mrs. Bowden. [*Reads aloud.*] "Please don't wait. Am meeting Richard at Innsbruck; would rather you not there."

JACK. Good Lord, what an extraordinary thing.

MILLICENT. They're *going* to make it up!

LANGTON. I'm astounded—he hasn't said a word of this——

JACK. [*To* MILLICENT]. We'd better go at once, she evidently wants us out of the way.

MILLICENT. Of course she does—but I'm so frightfully hungry.

JACK. [*Hurrying her.*] Never mind, we're sure to pass some place where we can get food. Come along

—our machines are outside. [*To* LANGTON.] She ought to be here now.

LANGTON. [*Who has not recovered from his surprise at the telegram.*] Yes—scuttle. If there is anything Richard dislikes it's observation.

JACK. [*To* MILLICENT.] Scuttle is the word. Come.

MILLICENT. [*Looking back.*] Do what you can, Mr. Langton.

LANGTON. [*After a moment's thought.*] I will. But I shall serve them best by bolting too. [*Looking out at doorway.*] I see the postman coming along the road, I'll wait for the letters—he usually leaves them here for us. . . . Good-bye.

[*The* PERCIVALS *go hurriedly by front door.* LANGTON *takes up book* VISITOR *had left, turns over the leaves with a significant smile. Enter* VISITOR.

LANGTON. Oh!—you are looking for this?

[*Gives him book.*

VISITOR. Thank you. An excellent work, have you read it?

LANGTON. Yes, some time ago. Excellent, as you say.

[*Postman enters. Goes up to Bureau. A bell rings.*

VISITOR. And there is the luncheon bell.

[VISITOR *gets his letters and exit.*

LANGTON. [*At bureau.*] Are there any for us?

[*Is looking through letters handed to him when* RICHARD BOWDEN *enters.*

LANGTON. Hullo! I'm just going—no letters for you.

RICHARD. I met the postman on the way, he gave me mine.

[*Pulls a packet from his side pocket.*

LANGTON. [*About to go.*] You'll be back presently?

RICHARD. Wait a moment, I want you.

LANGTON. [*Coming down stage.*] You'll be surprised to hear that a belated idiot staying at this hotel has got your book. He has just told me it's an excellent work. Why don't you let the world know and applaud you?

RICHARD. [*Shortly.*] I would rather not. In another year or two I shall probably take to active politics.

LANGTON. If they are not too corrupt by then. . . . I *must* hurry back . . . important letters to write before post time.

RICHARD. Look here. [*Opens a letter in his hand, pulls out some printed leaflets, etc.*] I wrote to Cook's people lately. I think of going round the world. They've sent me particulars.

[*Puts them down on side table.*

LANGTON. Lord!

RICHARD. But my plans may be suddenly changed, at least——

LANGTON. Changed?

RICHARD. Just now a telegram was brought up to the villa—from Blanche. She is coming here to meet me.

LANGTON. I know—the Percivals turned up just now.

RICHARD. [*Surprised.*] The Percivals?

LANGTON. [*Nodding.*] Cycling. She was to have met them here and lunched, but she telegraphed that she was meeting you and told them to get out of the way—so they've gone on.

RICHARD. Oh! [*Pleased but anxious, then abruptly.*] How were they?

LANGTON. Just the same—evidently billing and cooing still. [RICHARD *wrinkles his brow.*] They have a son.

RICHARD. [*Gravely, as if he envied them.*] A son—by Jove, a son. [*Pause.*

LANGTON. I thought Blanche didn't know you were here?

RICHARD. She explains that in some visitors' list she saw my name and address, and asks me to meet her at one o'clock at this hotel. She is driving to Silz.

LANGTON. Oh!—I'll bolt. [*Hesitates.*] We shall hear her arrive. I shall have time before she comes in. [*Looks at door* L.] She probably means to try and straighten things out—if you want to bring her to the villa and honeymoon, I'll go to Zell-am-See.

RICHARD. [*As if against his will.*] I wish it would turn out so.

LANGTON. [*Astonished.*] Look here, we have never discussed her—hardly spoken of her. Forgive me for speaking now, but this thing ought to be set

right—you are as obstinate as you can stick—but it's probably playing the devil with *both* your lives.

RICHARD. [*Between his teeth.*] It is with mine, I know that.

LANGTON. You may be certain it is with hers, the woman always comes off worst. I know she hit you hard in the first instance——

RICHARD. I never cared for any other woman—never shall.

LANGTON. All the same, you were not quite fair to her. [*They have sat down.*

RICHARD. [*Sharply.*] How wasn't I fair?

LANGTON. Well, you see, you only thought of your point of view, it didn't occur to you that she might have one.

RICHARD. Women should take their point of view from their husbands.

LANGTON. My dear chap, that's rot; education has played the devil with women, just as it has with the working classes—opened their eyes to their own capacities, given them the tip to cultivate them, and made them clamour——

RICHARD. For things they'd be better without.

LANGTON. That isn't the question. They've got to have them, to a certain extent—not all they want. I wouldn't give them the vote—see 'em damned first—but they expect to have a decent time now—and they *mean to have it.* They've grown more intelligent and they want a share, and a voice too, in the affairs of the world. Personally—to thrust my

opinion on you again—I think they should only have it from their own homes and on matters that concern them.

RICHARD. [*Impatiently.*] Well, I don't object to that.

LANGTON. But you expected Blanche to settle down with only your blessed society—when you chose to give it her—and you were never very genial—to wait on your moods and tempers; but never to have hers taken into account. I'm very fond of you, but I think you'd be the deuce for an ordinary woman to live with——

RICHARD. She's not an ordinary woman.

LANGTON. Which made it worse. . . . You won't recognise it because—I'm sorry to repeat it—you're as obstinate as the devil, but the relations of men and women are undergoing a readjustment, and if they only take it sensibly, each side will get more out of the other. When we've progressed a little further we shall hang any man who kicks his wife downstairs, and strangle any woman who gets drunk, but in spite of it, or because of it, we shall have more toleration between the sexes and get on a good deal better.

RICHARD. I don't want to listen to a dissertation on the relations of men and women—I wish you'd go back.

LANGTON. I'm going. But remember, if you want to turn me out and bring her there, I'll go—off like a rocket on a November night. It's what would happen if you really cared about her.

RICHARD. Cared about her—— [*almost fiercely, but as if against his will*] I love her more than my life. She has never been out of my thoughts—she's the background of everything.

LANGTON. [*With feeling.*] You'd better put her in the foreground again. [*Just touches* RICHARD'S *hand.*]

RICHARD. I wish to God she would come there.

LANGTON. She will—depend upon it, if you manage her properly. [*Looks round.*] I should order a sitting room—tell them to stick some flowers about—and have her shown up to it when she comes—you can't do much in this setting.

RICHARD. [*Looking up with a little smile.*] I'd better see how the land lies first—she's an imperious lady.

LANGTON. If she isn't subdued——

RICHARD. I did it once.

LANGTON. Do it again.

RICHARD. She was the most splendid creature in the world when I first met her——

LANGTON. She was—when you brought her to England.

RICHARD. You should have seen her as I saw her first, standing at the entrance of the great salon in the Zipernowsky palace. There was a light in her eyes that seemed to claim me——

LANGTON. I've heard something of this before, it must be true—— I expect all this estrangement has been a madness.

RICHARD. Or the marriage was one. [*Looks at his*

watch.] She ought to be here—Jenbach isn't very far.

LANGTON. I believe she's a nice woman—humour her a bit—get her back and don't be a fool. After all she only wanted a fling.

RICHARD. She shall have a fling if we set matters right—as big a fling as she pleases. . . . I couldn't have stood any other woman for a week.

LANGTON. You're in an excellent frame of mind, my dear chap. I shall go and look for my empty portmanteau. . . . [*Listens.*] She's there, I heard something stop. Good luck.

[*Exit hurriedly.*

[RICHARD *draws back watching the door* R. *Arrival bell rings. Hotel servants appear, a couple of trunks are carried in.* RICHARD *goes forward.* SIR HORACE TAYLOR *enters.*

SIR HORACE. [*Astonished.*] Hullo, Bowden, how do you do? Quite a surprise; haven't seen you for years—two years anyhow.

RICHARD. [*Taken aback for a moment.*] How do you do?

SIR HORACE. We passed your wife—she's driving and we're motoring—you're waiting for her, of course?

RICHARD. Yes.

SIR HORACE. Staying in this hotel?

RICHARD. No.

SIR HORACE. We've been to Bayreuth—went by Munich, going home by this route. [*To* HOTEL SERVANT.] You reserved our rooms? I telegraphed.

Lady Taylor and my son will be here to-morrow; I came on in front of them. [*To* RICHARD.] They wanted to see Salzburg on their way here, so they're staying behind for a day or two; I'm going to send back the motor for them. [*To* PORTER *carrying bag, etc.*] I'll follow you. Stay—is lunch going on?

SERVANT. Yes, sir.

SIR HORACE. Well, take up my things, I'll go in and eat—I'm famished. [*Goes towards dining-room. Looks back and says*] I expect you'll wait for your wife?

RICHARD. [*Who has taken up paper.*] Yes.

[*Exit* SIR HORACE. RICHARD *alone. Business. Arrival bell rings. A carriage is heard stopping. He comes down stage and stands watching door* R. *Servants go forward, etc.*

BLANCHE. [*Voice heard without.*] In half an hour I shall continue my journey; I shall not be longer. You can wait there. No, *no* luggage is to be brought in. Is Mr. Bowden here?

SERVANT. Yes, madame.

[BLANCHE *is dressed in travel clothes. All through the interview her manner is imperious and cold; her voice is sometimes passionate and scornful, but there is no anger or ill-feeling in it. Against his will,* RICHARD *evidently feels her fascination. He goes towards her as she enters.*

BLANCHE. [*Meeting him about centre and slightly touching the hand he holds out. To* HOTEL PORTER.] That will do. [*Waves him away. Then to* RICHARD.] I was

surprised to come across your name in that list—which I saw only by accident. You have a villa here?

HE. That villa up on the mountain.

[*She follows direction of his eyes, then turns away quickly.*

SHE. Are you there alone?

HE. A friend is staying with me.

SHE. Ah! a friend.

[*Looks round as if deciding where to sit.*

HE. We can't talk here very well. I was about to ask for a salon when you arrived.

SHE. [*Firmly.*] Oh no, this will do quite well. I prefer it. There is not much to say. . . . I did not expect you would come to Innsbruck any more.

[*Sits down by table* C.

HE. I have always liked Austria, and Innsbruck is one of my oldest haunts. Why should I avoid it now?

SHE. [*With a shrug.*] Ah, why? [*Signs to him to sit.*

HE. You have been in Vienna?

SHE. In Vienna—to see my relations and to look after my property. The Zipernowsky palace is sold. [*In a half-pathetic voice, and as if inadvertently.*] They are going to pull it down and build municipal buildings on its site. It is a tragedy.

HE. I agree—a tragedy. And now——

SHE. I am on my way back to London. And you?

HE. [*Frozen by her manner.*] At present my plans are indefinite.

SHE. You are not coming to England?

HE. I have no longer a home there.

SHE. [*With a little formal surprise.*] Oh?

HE. You were good enough to buy it.

SHE. Naturally—since you did not stay there I did not choose to live in your house any more. Till it was my own I felt that you were giving me your charity——

HE. [*Staring at her.*] My charity?

SHE. This is why I wished to see you—why I telegraphed. I felt that we must have an explanation. Every quarter your banker sends me money. I wrote to him, it was useless. To your lawyer, it was useless also. I did not know your address till I saw it in that list. Every quarter that money is paid into my account. It is an insult, and I will *not* have it.

HE. And it was to make this statement that you desired to meet me?

SHE. Yes, since to say it elsewhere has been useless.

HE. It is usual for a man to support the woman he has married.

SHE. [*Cold and courteous.*] But we are not together any more—we have separated—there are no children—there is no tie between us, except a legal one, which is only—— [*A shrug.*] . . . I want nothing from you—I will take nothing. I have sufficient money—I had enough before my uncle died—now I have more than enough.

He. And you are content with the life you are living, in your own house, spending your own money?

SHE [*with a smile.*] Quite content—it is all I want.

HE. All?

SHE. [*Cold and firm.*] All.

HE. You were not satisfied with the life I gave you.

SHE. You did not give me any—after the first months. [*A little break in her voice.*] You only gave me food and shelter, and money if I wanted it. If you lived any life yourself that was worth calling one —I do not know. You gave me nothing but what I have said, and you disliked that I should make a life for myself—or we might each have been satisfied.

HE. And my love?

SHE. Oh! it was such a poor thing; it was reckoned such a long way after your consideration for yourself—that I prefer not to discuss it. Any love I had for *you* is over and finished. I prefer also not to discuss that . . . I can never forgive your leaving me as you did.

HE. We were neither of us satisfied, we were not happy together. I did the best thing for both of us. You like the life you have now——

SHE [*triumphantly, yet half sadly.*] Yes! I know how the world is moving, what it is doing; I have power and place—

HE. Power and place!

SHE. The manner of life that satisfied me in Vienna before you came—I loved it. . . . I have loved it again since you went.

HE. [*Politely.*] Obviously there is nothing more to be said.

SHE. [*With a queer little laugh.*] It has all been so

absurd—it began because I gathered people round me. I was ambitious for you—for you, who had done nothing in the world since you went on the diplomatic mission to Petersburg when you were twenty-five or twenty-six—twelve years before we met—for twelve years you had done nothing. . . . Naturally I did not want that to continue; and for myself, I could not be content with the life of the average woman of thirty years ago.

He. [*Impatiently.*] It was better than the restlessness of the women of to-day—which is the result of men being too generous.

She. Generous!—how have they been generous?

He. They have opened too many doors to women.

She. Oh yes, they have opened doors—because women were beating against the bars—but they dislike seeing them go through—they grudge it, sometimes they hate it. We will not discuss that or we shall come to the Suffrage, and I am not a Suffragette—though I understand now the atmosphere that evolved them. . . . It is tradition that has hampered you—the traditions of years and years ago concerning women.

He. They were more than traditions, I have my convictions.

She. Oh yes, you have your convictions. And we parted, and you went away to nourish them.

He. I repeat—it was wise.

She. It was wise, no doubt. [*With a little forced*

laugh.] I am glad you went, for I do not love you any more.

HE. [*Calmly and gravely.*] You are very certain of your own point of view. It hasn't occurred to you that there is any other worth considering, that a man may possibly want to think and dream in peace—if he can afford the luxury of time—that he may want to be sure of himself before he attempts anything worth the doing. [*Pause.*] As for women, there is an army of women workers to-day for whom all men, who think and know about things, have admiration and respect. But there are other women, especially women in what we are pleased to call Society who seem to think that the world is carried on by silly committees and tea-parties, hurrying here and there, chattering and worrying, and never calmly possessing their own souls till they die—and then, God knows what becomes of them.

SHE. [*Taken aback.*] At silly committees and tea-parties many ropes are pulled that help the crowd waiting beneath—the people who cannot make their own voices heard. . . . Now I have said what I came to say, and I am going. [*She bows and avoids shaking hands, rises, gathers up her gloves.*]

HE. [*Astounded at the whole interview.*] You are going! It was to say this that you came here—for no other reason?

SHE. Oh yes, I am going. I came for no other reason. [*She is about to go when the tone of his voice arrests her; he leans a little forward as he speaks.*]

HE. You wish to be free, perhaps—free to marry elsewhere?

SHE. [*Quickly.*] No, I do not wish to marry elsewhere—I have all the freedom I want. . . . But you, do you wish it?

HE. No. . . . But *you* are young . . . beautiful. [*She shrugs.*] You could marry more happily?

SHE. I have said . . . but—again—it is for yourself you speak? . . . you wish— [*He shakes his head*] not to make other ties?

HE. No. I prefer the hard and fast boundary our—what was once our—marriage sets up.

SHE. But you have a friend at the villa?

HE. The friend is my cousin, Henry Langton.

SHE. Ah yes. That prevents you from being lonely—though you always liked being alone.

HE. As you do?

SHE. [*Wearily.*] Yes, as I do. [*To a* PORTER, *who crosses the stage at the back.*] Would you see if the carriage is there? [*Looks round.*] It is very beautiful here—this place, I mean. I like to think it is a bit of *my* country. . . . [*Then to* RICHARD.] I hope the villa is pleasant; it looks so charming from here. [*She bows, turns away from him and goes towards the door by which she had entered. Then in a voice that is cold and yet full of suppressed feeling.*] I wish you a great deal of happiness. [*He bows. Hotel servants come from the background. To them.*] The carriage is there? I am going——

SERVANT. [*Surprised.*] You go already, madame, you require nothing?

BLANCHE. I require nothing—but to go.

RICHARD. [*Who has followed her two or three steps.*] Let me see you to your carriage?

BLANCHE. [*In a voice that is for a moment unsteady.*] Please not. [*Firmly.*] I would rather that you do not. [*She turns to go.*

[*He bows and turns away, goes towards table at the side to take up letters and circulars about going round the world.*

[*She looks at him for one moment, hesitates, which he does not see, then with a quick step goes out.*

[*The carriage is heard going off.* RICHARD *stands listening, then sits, puts his head in his hands for a moment, rises abruptly, exit.*

ACT III

TIME: *Two more years have elapsed. Afternoon.*

SCENE: BLANCHE'S *drawing-room in Green Street. There is a fire in the grate. In front of it she is sitting in a high-backed armchair. Her hands are crossed on her lap and she gives an impression of loneliness. She looks a little older and graver. Some of the Visitors look older, talk together, and are less attracted by her than in* ACT I. *A long pause. Clock on the mantelshelf strikes; it seems to startle her; she looks up, and round the room, then relapses into reverie again.*

Enter SERVANT *announcing* "MRS. PERCIVAL." MILLICENT *brings some roses, puts them on* BLANCHE'S *lap.*]

BLANCHE. [*Pleased.*] Ah, I'm glad when you come. [*Takes up roses.*] How sweet of you.

MILLICENT. I'm always glad to come. But, dear Blanche, a fire?

BLANCHE. I know—I was very cold.

MILLICENT. But it's so warm, almost summer.

BLANCHE. [*With a little shiver.*] Is it?

MILLICENT. I came early; I thought we might get a little talk before anyone arrived. [*They sit.*

BLANCHE. Oh yes, it's Saturday. [*Bending towards the fire.*] It's Saturday every week . . . [*Change of tone.*] How is your little son?

MILLICENT. He's lovely—You haven't seen him for nearly two months.

BLANCHE. [*Kindly.*] No—but I should like to see him——

MILLICENT. He runs about everywhere. [*Lifts her head as if listening to him overhead.*] I love to hear him patter, patter across the nursery floor.

BLANCHE. [*Wistfully.*] You *must* love it—patter, patter across the nursery floor——

MILLICENT. [*Half afraid.*] If *you* only had a child——

BLANCHE. [*Little sound of dismay and longing but very distant.*] A child! [*Absently puts her arms together. Then abruptly*] It's nearly five o'clock.

MILLICENT. [*To cover her mistake.*] And time for your visitors.

BLANCHE. [*With a shrug.*] If any come. They are dwindling away and they're not so exalted as formerly; they have been coming for five years—four years to me alone. . . . [*Cynically.*] The new people don't struggle to come any more.

MILLICENT. Don't they?

BLANCHE. No. Only some one who is brought once —just once. It is part of his equipment for the world. . . . In his middle age he will be able to say:

"Oh yes; I went to her salon when I was young." That's all. [*A little laugh and recovering.*] But I don't want them—there is a terrible sameness about them. Each one is intent on his own set of interests. They seem to enter with their packs anxious to display their wares, and to go, like so many pedlars. I am tired of them.

MILLICENT. But the original worshippers are faithful; there's Mr. Carstairs, for instance. He was reading to you the other day——

BLANCHE. [*With a little laugh and a grimace.*] Oh yes, I am sorry for him; that is why I listen to his poems. He thinks he is going to be immortal, but in the day when all good work comes by its own there will be no sign of anything he has done. [*As if without intention.*] If Richard had chosen to work—the chances would have leaped to him . . .

MILLICENT. Is he never coming back?

BLANCHE. [*Coldly.*] He likes being abroad.

MILLICENT. [*Very gently.*] Why don't you go to him?

BLANCHE. I like being here. [*With a change of mood.*] It's a good thing to be alone, to live your own life and to be free. There has been so much nonsense talked about freedom, but in freedom and loneliness power is born—and some things are better than happiness.

MILLICENT. My dearest Blanche, forgive me for saying it—but that is only high falutin'—with no comfort in it. I think a great deal of nonsense is

talked about power too. We want happiness—it's the most difficult thing of all to get, and does every one heaps of good.

BLANCHE. [*Amused.*] Millicent, Millicent, you have been thinking.

MILLICENT. No, it's Jack—somehow he always thinks the things that I am going to feel. [*Pause.*

BLANCHE. [*Trying not to show any eagerness.*] Does Jack ever hear from Richard? [MILLICENT *shakes her head.*] Or of him? [*Gets up, arranges roses.*]

MILLICENT. Sometimes he sees his name in print——

BLANCHE. That is how I knew he was at Innsbruck two years ago. I saw his name in print.

MILLICENT. [*Half afraid to ask.*] Do you know where he is now?

BLANCHE. No, only that he went round the world . . . he may be back . . . I don't know . . . I think it's easier when he's far off. . . . [*Fastening one rose at her waist*] but I have been lonely sometimes.

MILLICENT. You have kept every one at such a distance.

BLANCHE. I know . . . I couldn't help it; all these years I have felt as if I were in a little boat tossing on an uneasy sea—the ships passed and the passengers waved their handkerchiefs, but nobody could reach me. . . . Now the little boat is going over the horizon and out of sight.

MILLICENT. What do you mean?

BLANCHE. I shall go away. [*Stands holding out*

her hands to MILLICENT, *but avoids their being taken.*] It's impossible to bear it any longer—I cannot. I shall go back to my own country—to Vienna, or to Hungary; I want to see the great Hungarian plains once more, the infinite—infinite space.

MILLICENT. But, Blanche dear, what will the worshippers do?

BLANCHE. There is that woman in Ebury Street, Mrs. Ferrers. She is young and pretty and happy. Everybody goes to *her* now.

MILLICENT. I've heard of her, but I never went there, did you?

BLANCHE. No, and she never comes here.

MILLICENT. [*After hesitation.*] I want to tell you something—perhaps you know already. But Jack heard it only lately—it has been kept a great secret—

BLANCHE. A secret—about Richard?

MILLICENT. [*Nods.*] He wrote that book "Political Life" that made such a stir three years ago. [BLANCHE *is speechless with surprise.*] Isn't it queer, a visitor was reading it at Innsbruck when we were there, and Jack looked at it, but never dreamt it was his.

BLANCHE. When we were at Innsbruck? . . . I knew he could do things. He wrote it and never made a sign! How he must despise me, who thought he would do nothing. It doesn't matter—he did it, he *did it.* [*Looks up, her face is suffused with happiness.*] If I'd only *known* at Innsbruck!

MILLICENT. We did so hope things would come right there. You said nothing when you came on to Silz?

BLANCHE. No.

MILLICENT. We didn't dare ask what had happened —you seemed desperately anxious to get away from us.

BLANCHE. Yes, I was desperately anxious to get away.

[*Enter* SERVANT *announcing* "MR. CARSTAIRS."

BLANCHE. [*To* CARSTAIRS, *trying to be polite.*] How do you do?

ALGY CARSTAIRS. Dear lady, I venture here again—Mrs. Percival? [*Shakes hands.*

MILLICENT. How do you do? [*To* BLANCHE.] I must go, but you'll see me again soon.

BLANCHE. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, soon—come back later today—I want you.

MILLICENT. I will if I can. [*Exit.*

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*Fervently.*] I hoped you would be alone.

BLANCHE. You want to discuss something?

ALGY CARSTAIRS. No . . . it is happiness to be with you—and alone.

BLANCHE. We all measure happiness differently.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. There is only one way for me.

BLANCHE. Ah! . . . Tell me, is there any news—political news—or news about books?

ALGY CARSTAIRS. I have not thought about news.

BLANCHE. You have been too busy with your work?

ALGY CARSTAIRS. I can't work.

BLANCHE. Perhaps you have written an epic and feel that you must rest after it?

ALGY CARSTAIRS. I have written nothing. I shall

never write again—unless you help me. . : . You *must* listen to me, you must——

BLANCHE. [*Haughtily.*] There is nothing that I *must* do.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. You know what I want to say—I love you, I love you. You are unhappy. I feel that your soul wrestles as mine does—that you need me.

BLANCHE. I need *you!*

ALGY CARSTAIRS. You need my love, as I do yours. I worship you, and cannot live without you.

BLANCHE. You are talking nonsense.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. No—of life and death.

BLANCHE. You are a poet, and life and death are easy words to you. Either you are talking nonsense, and I forgive you, or you are insulting, and I shall have you turned out. [*Rings.*] I am ringing for tea. [*In answer to his alarmed look.*] We must be soothed after this excitement. I shall forget your folly, and you will soon be ashamed of it.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. Oh, dear lady, if you knew—if you could dream——

BLANCHE. I do not want to know or to dream.

[*Enter* SERVANT *announcing* "MR. HESKETH."
Exit. But returns with tea, etc., and arranges it.

BLANCHE. Here is the editor—most opportunely. How do you do, Mr. Hesketh? Mr. Carstairs is writing an epic—you shall publish it in your paper.

HESKETH. Heaven forbid!

BLANCHE. Oh! but it would be a great attraction.

HESKETH. Most kind of you, my dear Mrs. Bowden,

most kind of you—but a newspaper is for the vulgar; they have not yet learnt to appreciate epics.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*Trying to recover.*] I must go——

BLANCHE. [*Sitting at tea table.*] Oh no; you must have some tea, and be agreeable to Mr. Hesketh. He reviews epics even if he doesn't publish them.

[*Enter* SIR HORACE TAYLOR.

BLANCHE. How is Sir Horace? [*Shakes hands.*]

SIR HORACE. Quite well—and you? [*Nodding to* HESKETH *and* CARSTAIRS.] I congratulate you on your husband's book—every one knows it now, but you kept the secret well. I have not seen him since we met at Innsbruck. You remember?

BLANCHE. Oh yes; I remember.

[*The others look at her surprised.*

SIR HORACE. [*Curiously.*] Did you go to your villa on the mountain?

BLANCHE. [*Distantly.*] Richard liked that villa.

HESKETH. I suppose he will be home soon? It doesn't take long to get round the world nowadays.

BLANCHE. Richard is a leisurely person. . . . Some tea?

SIR HORACE. Thank you. . . . Mrs. Ferrers will be so interested to hear he wrote that book; she was convinced it was some one else.

HESKETH. I'm going on there presently.

SIR HORACE. So am I.

BLANCHE. [*With a little laugh.*] Worshippers at the new shrine. There are two things that always hold their own. Mystery—how fascinating it is! Should

we any of us be good if heaven were an explored country?

SIR HORACE. Or wicked, if the other place were? But what is the other thing?

BLANCHE. Firstness, newness—the first time—the *new* thing—it is wonderful. But when the firstness is over—the newness—then—it is different.

SIR HORACE. That's true; especially of marriage. . . . [*Turning to* HESKETH.] By the way, I hear that Galton is going to get a divorce.

HESKETH. That's rather amusing.

BLANCHE. [*Cynically.*] Is it? But such strange things are called amusing now. [*Enter* WIDHURST.] Ah, Mr. Widhurst, what is the theatrical news? Have you got a new part?

WIDHURST. [*Sitting down and nodding to the others.*] Not yet, Mrs. Bowden. Managers appear to be out all day and on the stage all night, and they never answer letters, so it's rather difficult to get at them.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. It's worse for the author of a play. Parkinson—actor-manager and scoundrel—had one five months, a beautiful thing, purest tragedy in blank verse.

WIDHURST. Of course—blank.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*Frowns.*] I know its qualities well, Widhurst. It would have done for your Theatre of Intellect—what became of that?

WIDHURST. I couldn't get a theatre, and there wasn't any intellect—at least not where there was any money.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. And the poet and the great dramatist—what are they to do?

WIDHURST. [*A shrug.*] It's no good being that sort of person till you're dead, and then you don't do anything; you belong to the largest leisured class in the world—or out of it.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*Sadly.*] And the most beautiful —Immortality goes reaping among it.

[*Enter* BERTRAM.

BLANCHE. I hoped you would come.

BERTRAM. [*Aside to her.*] I came to thank you.

BLANCHE. It is settled?

BERTRAM. [*Nodding.*] I heard from the Chief last night—— Yes, some tea, if I may. This morning he sent for me.

[HESKETH *and* CARSTAIRS *on one side standing together.*

HESKETH. [*In a low tone.*] It's extraordinary that Bowden should have written that book.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. I can't believe it now—he has cleverness, of course, but no genius.

HESKETH. [*Looking at his watch.*] The one is often fatal to the other. He is a very remarkable man.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. He is an abstraction, and unworthy of her. [*Looking towards* BLANCHE.] How beautiful she is, and full of poetry.

HESKETH. She's not what she was a few years ago. I shall never forget her the year that Bowden took himself off.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*In an undertone.*] I could die for her.

HESKETH. Ah, a young man often feels that sort of thing about a woman a year or two older than himself.

BLANCHE. [*Who is talking to* BERTRAM.] I'm so glad my little hint was useful.

BERTRAM. It did everything. Lord Faringhurst wrote first, and this morning I heard it was all right.

BERTRAM. I can never thank you enough.

HESKETH. [*Overhearing.*] Has Mrs. Bowden been putting in a word for you, Bertram?

BERTRAM. She is always doing good deeds.

[*Enter* MRS. MARTIN, *elderly.*

MRS. MARTIN. Dear Mrs. Bowden. Surrounded as usual——

BLANCHE. How do you do? [*Gets up.*] Stay, do sit here, this chair is so comfortable.

MRS. MARTIN. [*Mistaking the chair offered.*] Oh, no, I couldn't sit there—it's your place.

BLANCHE. Yes, yes [*smiling*]—and some tea? Oh—it doesn't matter.

[MRS. MARTIN *with a bland smile has floundered into* BLANCHE'S *chair, who is thus left standing; she looks amused.*

BLANCHE. [*Introducing.*] You know Sir Horace Taylor—Mrs. Martin.

MRS. MARTIN. So pleased to meet you, Sir Horace. [*To* BLANCHE, *so that he hears.*] Such a famous man. [*He is evidently disgusted.*] There are always such interesting people here. [MRS. MARTIN *makes business*

with the tea-things; WIDHURST *hands her cake, etc. To* WIDHURST.] I feel sure you are a celebrity, too?

WIDHURST. Oh no—I take a humble interest in the theatre—wish it returned the compliment.

[*Enter* SERVANT *with note, "From Mrs. Percival," for* BLANCHE, *who moves apart from her visitors.*

BLANCHE. [*Reads.*] "Mr. Bowden is in England—Jack heard it. He is going away immediately."

[*She gives a little cry and scrunches the note in her hand.*

ALGY CARSTAIRS. Mrs. Bowden, are you ill?

BLANCHE. Oh, no; my head—that is all. It is nothing—I am tired perhaps.

[*Smooths out note and reads it again.*

HESKETH. I must be going.

SIR HORACE. So must I. Oh, I quite forgot to tell you a funny story. [*Laughs.*] I met Grimshaw last night. Asked him when he was going to marry again; said he didn't think he should—white women were so much alike he never could tell his own wife from another man's, and he didn't like black women.

[*He and* HESKETH *laugh.*

MRS. MARTIN. [*Primly.*] It's not a very pleasant story.

SIR HORACE. Awfully funny, you know.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. I don't see any point in it. Do you, Mrs. Bowden?

BLANCHE. [*Looking up.*] I fear I wasn't listening; it was very rude of me.

BERTRAM. [*Sympathetically.*] We ought to go away. Mrs. Bowden is tired.

BLANCHE. Oh no.

HESKETH. I *must* go.

SIR HORACE. And I'm due in Ebury Street. Good-bye, Mrs. Bowden—so glad about the book.

HESKETH. I'll come with you.

SIR HORACE. Capital! Come too, Carstairs? Mrs. Ferrers delights in the rising poet. We'll introduce you.

SIR HORACE. [*Aside to* HESKETH, *while* CARSTAIRS *is bending over her hand.*] She is getting almost dull; that story was thrown away upon her.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*Aside to* BLANCHE.] Let me stay a little while.

BLANCHE. [*Bewildered.*] No, I would rather you went.

ALGY CARSTAIRS. [*To* BLANCHE.] You forgive me?

BLANCHE. Forgive? Oh yes——

HESKETH. [*To her.*] Good-bye. We ought to have known sooner about that book.

[BLANCHE *shakes hands with him and with* SIR HORACE. *They depart with* CARSTAIRS.

MRS. MARTIN. You were so kind to me the other day about the plot of my new novel, Mrs. Bowden. [*Opens black bag, brings out MS.*]

BERTRAM [*Aside to* WIDHURST.] Do let's get her away. Mrs. Bowden is *very* tired.

MRS. MARTIN. [*Goes on.*] I wanted to consult you on one more point. I make Philip marry the wrong

woman—the dramatic side will interest Mr. Widhurst——

BLANCHE. I am too stupid to-day, I fear——

WIDHURST. I wish you'd consult me, Mrs. Martin. I'm rather a dab at that sort of thing. My sister wrote a novel, so did my aunt. If you will let me drive you to North Kensington; you said you lived there the other day—charming neighbourhood—we might talk it over on the way. I know Mrs. Bowden has a headache, but my head's in particularly good condition. If you don't mind coming now——

BLANCHE. [*Gratefully to* WIDHURST.] Oh——

MRS. MARTIN. I shall be delighted. [*Gets up.*

BLANCHE. Good-bye. I shall see the result in print. Mr. Widhurst is splendid—so clever.

[*They go, only* BERTRAM *is left.*

BLANCHE. [*To* BERTRAM.] That nice man took her away out of kindness.

BERTRAM. It really was noble of him. [*Hesitates.*] I'm going too—— If I can be of any service to you at any time, do let me. I shall never forget all you have done for me.

BLANCHE. When do you go to India?

BERTRAM. Next month. I shall often think of you —and write too, if I may, and tell you how the appointment works out.

BLANCHE. Yes, do. [*Exit* BERTRAM.

[BLANCHE *alone; sits by the fire again. Servant takes away tea. A pause.*

[*Enter* MILLICENT. BLANCHE *gets up and waits, unable to speak.*

MILLICENT. I thought you might want me.

BLANCHE. [*As if afraid to ask.*] Yes, I want you. Tell me all you know.

MILLICENT. It is hardly anything. George Austin saw him two nights ago at Euston. He had just arrived from Japan or somewhere. He is leaving London again to-night.

BLANCHE. But where is he?

MILLICENT. Brown's Hotel.

BLANCHE. [*Desperately.*] Oh, if he would see me and take me back. I cannot bear it or pretend any longer. I want him back.

MILLICENT. [*Astonished.*] Blanche! Go to him.

BLANCHE. I am afraid—I did—a month after Innsbruck, he was in London for two nights before he sailed——

MILLICENT. Yes?

BLANCHE. He was like a stone to me. It is killing me—I deserve it; for I was cruel, brutal, detestable at Innsbruck.

MILLICENT. [*Still astounded.*] We thought you didn't care. You seemed to exult in your freedom.

BLANCHE. I did for a little while. I wouldn't let myself think or feel—it was as if against my will—my underwill—I was carried over a tide . . . but it has all been a disguise of my love for him, of my desperation. Why shouldn't I say it? He is mine

though he stays away all the days of his life—he is mine.

MILLICENT. [*Still wondering.*] And all the time you have cared?

BLANCHE. [*Distracted.*] Cared? For good or ill he has not been one instant out of my thoughts since we parted. Some hours have been calm—I buoyed myself up with a sham happiness—but it has seemed as if in some secret place—that was always near—there was a rack that mercilessly drew me to it for a little spell or a long one—just as might be—every day or night, sometimes one and sometimes the other—and bound me to it, and ground at my heart and soul, and every pulse that is in me . . .

MILLICENT. Something *must* be done.

BLANCHE. [*As if she had not heard.*] And he is there—not ten minutes off, yet I dare not go to him. He wouldn't even see me. I know it.

MILLICENT. Let Jack go to him. They knew each other so well at one time. He is downstairs, he didn't like to come up. But let him go to Mr. Bowden.

BLANCHE. It would be no good. He would talk about his convictions—he has built an altar to them and my happiness is the burnt sacrifice offered up upon it.

MILLICENT. What did he say when you went to him—in London, I mean?

BLANCHE. [*Bitterly, and as if in a dream.*] He said that we had decided to live apart; that I had not

cared for the life he gave me, nor to live in his house, so he had left me to the life I liked in the house I had bought; that admiration and freedom were what I prized most, and now they were mine; that I had said at Innsbruck my love for him was over and finished and everything between us was at an end—and it was true—it was at an end. His manner froze me, paralysed me—and I went. [MILLICENT *tries to caress her, but she shakes her off.*] . . . If I only knew how he lives and whether there is any other place he calls home. Or if he would come back for just a little while I might bear the separate ways again. I could bear reproaches, anger, anything but this silence and this empty house—this starving for sight and sound of him.

MILLICENT. Do let Jack go to him. It can't make things worse—it might do some good.

BLANCHE. I wonder—I wonder——

MILLICENT. Or write to him?

BLANCHE. [*Hesitates—then suddenly.*] Yes, yes, I'll write to him. And Jack shall take it. [*Goes towards writing-table on the* L *well down stage. Turns to* MILLICENT.] Go down, dear, and tell Jack—ask him if he'll go—I must be alone while I write. Come back in five minutes and bring him. [MILLICENT *takes her hands, kisses them, and goes.* BLANCHE, *left alone, kneels or throws herself down on a chair—passionately repeats the words as she writes them.*]

"Richard, *my* Richard—come back. I am longing for you, dying for you. Come back. I send you this

rose—[*plucks it from her dress*]—I have covered it with kisses—come to me, I cannot bear life without you.—Your own—yours and yours, BLANCHE."

[*Folds the letter, puts it for a moment against her face. Enter* JACK *and* MILLICENT.

BLANCHE. [*Giving note to* JACK.] Take it—bring him back——

JACK. [*Taking note and rose.*] I will, I swear I will. Let Millicent wait with you. Only a little while and I will bring him to you as I did the night he first saw you.

BLANCHE. Oh!—if you do—if you do!

JACK. I will, dear friend, I will. [*Exit.*

BLANCHE. [*With a shudder and looking towards the clock.*] A few minutes—and I shall know my fate—shall be in Heaven, or for ever shut out from it.

Enter SERVANT *announcing* "MRS. VYNOR."

MRS. VYNOR [*Evidently worried.*] I came late on purpose. I hoped I might find you alone.

BLANCHE. [*Aghast at her coming.*] Yes, I am alone, except for Mrs. Percival—but it is late—and——

MRS. VYNOR. [*Hesitatingly.*] I do so want to speak to you.

MILLICENT. I'll go into the next room to write a note—if I may? [*Exit* MILLICENT.

BLANCHE. [*Piteously.*] I'm very tired to-day——

MRS. VYNOR. I will only stay a few minutes. You were so kind long ago when my little girl was ill—and when she died you made me feel the Majesty

of Death . . . and so much I'd never thought of before.

BLANCHE. Ah, poor thing, I remember about the child. But I don't remember being kind.

MRS. VYNOR. Oh, but you were indeed; and now I come again. I want you to help me——

BLANCHE. [*Wonderingly.*] To help you? How can I help you? [*The effort to be calm puts a wild look into her eyes.*]

MRS. VYNOR. I'm so unhappy about Geoffrey. This last year or two I have altered—I have read a great deal and been to meetings and I see things differently. Last week I spoke at a meeting and he hated it. He won't let me do the things I want to do. He doesn't understand that the world has changed—for women.

BLANCHE. Oh yes, it has changed, but not in the way that many women think. What are you going to do?

MRS. VYNOR. He says he can't care for me if—if I do this sort of thing. I thought that perhaps you would advise me. If I were to separate from him and be free as you are? Would people say things—would they think there had been anything wrong?

BLANCHE. [*Scornfully.*] People! What do they matter? [*Walks across the room and stops before* MRS. VYNOR.] Why did you marry your husband? Because he was rich?

MRS. VYNOR. No.

BLANCHE. Because you were tired of not being married?

MRS. VYNOR. No. Because I loved him—I love him still, but there are other things——

BLANCHE. [*With a curiously defiant manner.*] Oh yes, there are other things—but unless we have love—the love of those we love—the world is empty. We are two women standing here alone, and it's better to face the truth; men can do without love, can be happy or content, but women can't—it's no good pretending. They can't—can't—till they are old and burnt out, and then they are mourners at a funeral. . . .

MRS. VYNOR. [*A little scared.*] But women are doing so much nowadays one doesn't want to be out of it, and heaps of them are happy without love.

BLANCHE. [*Shakes her head.*] No, they only act as if they were. They want human ties—close—close ties. They are taking makeshifts. . . . That is why I'm so sorry for them. . . . And if men had treated them differently women wouldn't have clamoured for the vote—nor broken windows—life would have been full enough.

MRS. VYNOR. [*Blankly.*] Men are cleverer and stronger than we are, I suppose; that is why—why——

BLANCHE. [*Calmer.*] Oh yes, it is why—why many things; but of two people one *must* be the stronger. And our weakness—the inward secret weakness of our hearts—puts us at their mercy. This—this is the real tragedy of our sex, its handicap. We try to hide it, to conquer it, but we can't—can't—and if women get the power they are struggling for, it will be a husk unless they have love too.

MRS. VYNOR. Bnt why can't we have both? We are not stupid any more.

BLANCHE. [*Holds out her arms with a gesture of despair, then with a queer little laugh.*] Ah! . . . We are what we are and we can go so far—let us go. . . . The leopard cannot change his spots nor the black man his skin, nor woman her nature . . . and nothing fights for its own as Nature does. . . . Oh, I have thought it over — all these years — thought and thought till I am tired of thinking. Women may reach out to the world with pride and joy feeling their capacities—and they *have* them—but in the end they come back to their own for happiness or—[*with a little gasp*] for peace. That does not mean that they are not to use the capacities, but . . . that they should be wise gardeners.

MRS. VYNOR. And what am *I* to do?

BLANCHE. Go home—and think too—think it all over. . . . I want you to go now [*very gently as if it is an entreaty*], I'm ill and tired.

MRS. VYNOR. [*Still a little scared.*] You look so unhappy——

BLANCHE. I have been, I may be—I don't know. Perhaps I am very happy—I am waiting. So much of women's lives is spent in waiting.

MRS. VYNOR. You are waiting for——

BLANCHE. [*Desperately.*] You mustn't question me. I can't bear it. . . . There are plenty of things in life for women—go home and take those you can reach to. Go home—and look pretty and laugh; men are not won

by tears—tell him that you love him—and be thankful for the sound of his voice—[*In a half reckless, half scornful voice.*]

MRS. VYNOR. But there's such a thing as spirit.

BLANCHE. Oh yes, there's such a thing as spirit; but one has to make the best of life with the material there is to hand. It is foolish to suffer hunger and thirst, or to die of cold when water and food and shelter are near.

MRS. VYNOR. [*Firmly and surprised.*] Mrs. Bowden, you don't understand—and you have changed so—you seem to have gone back—to be worsted somehow——

BLANCHE. Just now you said that men were cleverer and stronger than women——

MRS. VYNOR. Yes—yes—and they *must* be—for women are such hero-worshippers; they don't see it yet—they don't know it—but *that's* what the woman-movement means, for as women reach high they will want men to reach higher, so that they may love them still——

BLANCHE. [*Quickly.*] They want that more than anything in the world, and to be loved back.

MRS. VYNOR. [*Half despairingly.*] Yes, more than anything in the world. [*Exit.*

[BLANCHE *stands quite still.*

[*Re-enter* MILLICENT *from the other room.*

MILLICENT. I heard her go.

BLANCHE. [*Standing dazed.*] I am glad she came, for at the last she said a wise thing—perhaps it *is* an upward movement. . . . But Millicent, what a Jugger-

naut love is—women try to keep out of its way—and pay dearly if they succeed. Some throw themselves under it desperately, and some joyfully, as I shall—it is on every road—coming—or going . . . [MILLICENT *nods her head,* BLANCHE *looks at the clock with a gasp.*] . . . It must be time.

MILLICENT. They will be here directly. . . .

[*They wait nervously listening and watching the clock.*

BLANCHE. [*Desperately.*] It is such a little way. The letter must bring him—and if he's angry and won't read it, he'll see the rose, and—— [*Turns away.*

MILLICENT. He *must* come.

BLANCHE. He must come . . . [*Uplifted and happiness breaking over her face*] I can feel that he will . . . [*Restless, crosses the room, listens and returns.*] I'll persuade him to go away from this house. . . . [*Pause.*] I've wandered up and down the stairs and buried my head in every cushion to drive back the agony that stupefied me—and the memory of it clings to the walls and to everything between them. . . . I will make him take me to the country. Or we'll go abroad—together. . . . I know he'll come, I can see him—and just how he will look. At first he will be a little cold and stiff——

MILLICENT. Jack would take me in his arms and cover me with kisses if he were making up a quarrel.

BLANCHE. It hasn't been a quarrel—[*half resenting*] and Richard is not that sort of man. He'll come in

and hesitate, and say "You sent for me?" And I shall say "Yes—yes." And then I shall go up to him—and he will stand still—and—Hark! he is coming. [*Listens.*] Yes, they have come! [*Flies to door.*]

MILLICENT. [*Holds her back.*] It will only be a second longer.

BLANCHE. [*Transfixed.*] One man's step—*one.*

[*She staggers back as the door opens. Enter* JACK; *he stands quite still. She waits dumb and trembling.*

MILLICENT. Jack, speak—[*he hesitates*]—you must.

BLANCHE. Was he there?

JACK. He has *been* there—he has gone.

BLANCHE. Gone!

JACK. Three hours ago.

BLANCHE. [*In a dead voice.*] Where?—when does he return?

JACK. They don't know. He is going on some expedition—they thought two years—or less or more—they were quite vague.

BLANCHE. Two years! . . . I shall be dead. . . . It won't matter, I shall be dead. [*They go forward, she makes a little sign to keep them back.*] Where is the letter—and my rose?

JACK. I put them into a little cardboard box. They are to forward letters when he telegraphs an address. I thought it might go with them.

BLANCHE. I see. Thank you, Jack. [*Gently, but in a cold stately voice, as they go forward again.*] Don't

touch me. . . . You will go now . . . you won't mind? I must be alone.

MILLICENT. Mayn't I stay a little?

BLANCHE. I think not dear—if you will forgive me. [*Turns to* JACK *and says gently*] Take her away. I must be alone if I am to keep my senses or even to live. But I shall never forget what you two have done for me this night.

JACK. If there is anything more in the world——

BLANCHE. I know—you will do it. [*She holds out her hands as if entreating, and they go.*]

[BLANCHE *alone. She goes to the chair by the fire again and sits very still with her hands on her lap. Enter* SERVANT *with a note.*

SERVANT. The messenger is waiting for an answer, ma'am.

BLANCHE. Ah! [*Rises to her feet, sees the handwriting, hurriedly reads letter, and her excitement dies away. She sits again, and she says in a dull voice.*] Bring me the writing-pad. [*Looks towards writing-table. He brings it.*] Come back in two minutes.

[*Exit* SERVANT.

BLANCHE. [*Reading note aloud.*] "I am very happy again. I told him it was your doing. I love you.—CLARE VYNOR." [BLANCHE *gives a long sigh. Writes. The pad is on her lap.*] "I am glad. Be happy always." [*Rest indistinct. Folds note.* SERVANT *enters.*] Put this down, and here is the answer.

[*Gives him pad and note. Exit* SERVANT.

BLANCHE. [*Turns to the fire again. A long pause. Puts her face in her hands. Starts, listens, as if she heard something, shakes her head as if it couldn't concern her.*

The door behind her opens, and RICHARD *enters and hesitates. She slowly turns, sees him, and starts to her feet.*] Richard! Rich-ard! [*She holds out her arms for one minute. But he stands as if paralysed, and she drops them and speaks in a voice she can hardly control.*] They said you had gone.

RICHARD. [*Coldly.*] I had left something behind and went back—I found the note—and the rose.

[*She stands scared and waiting. He doesn't move.*

BLANCHE. [*At last manages to say.*] And you forgive?——

RICHARD. There was never any question of forgiving between us. We have both been wrong—both. I was a brute. [*She shakes her head and shudders as if at the remembrance.*] I was going away again——

BLANCHE. [*Under her breath.*] But you haven't gone. [*Then passionately.*] Oh, these years, what they have been!

RICHARD. I thought you were content with a life of your own.

BLANCHE. [*Shaking her head a little.*] When I was with you I wanted to be part of your life. [*Then with a burst of emotion.*] . . . And to be loved—all women want that—more than anything in the world.

RICHARD. [*Under his breath.*] So do men, but they won't own it—or don't know it. [*Pause. Almost doggedly and coldly.*] I took the kisses off your rose.

BLANCHE. Oh— [*She stands still staring at him, paralysed.*

RICHARD. [*Goes on as if speaking half to himself.*] I know this—that I love you more than my life, and the thing I have longed for most in the world was to hold you in my arms again.

[*She gives a cry of joy. They meet, and he holds her close.*

BLANCHE. And you will not go away again?

RICHARD. Never without you—beloved.

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